

The State: DeMint, Wilson rip bogus job creation claims

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A government Web site reported stimulus funds produced jobs in nonexistent districts

By JAMES ROSEN

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WASHINGTON - Republican lawmakers piled on the Obama administration Tuesday - and Democratic leaders were miffed - over a Web site that reported thousands of jobs nationwide in congressional districts that don't exist.

In South Carolina, www.recovery.gov reported \$40.7 million in economic-stimulus money had gone to seven nonexistent congressional districts - including District 00 and District 25.

South Carolina only has six U.S. House districts, Nos. 1-6.

The Web site, the official federal online portal for tracking distributions from the \$787 billion stimulus program, compounded the error by saying 46 jobs - 46.4, to be exact - have been "saved or created" with the recovery money in the seven districts.

"The attempts to cover up the dismal failure of the president's trillion-dollar stimulus have gone from comical to embarrassing," said U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint, a Greenville Republican.

U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, a Springdale Republican, issued a scathing critique.

"The government Web site charged with reporting waste, fraud and abuse is its very own worst offender," Wilson said. "I know we have been asking this administration to show us the jobs, but this isn't what we had in mind."

Similar errors on recovery.gov showed up in states across the country. California is shown to have seven congressional districts - including the 99th District - in addition to the 53 it actually has.

Republicans weren't the only ones to criticize the error. U.S. Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, gave a stinging rebuke.

"The inaccuracies on recovery.gov that have come to light are outrageous," Obey said. "The administration owes itself, the Congress and every American a commitment to work night and day to correct the ludicrous mistakes."

White House press aides did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Ed Pound, spokesman for the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, told ABC News that human error caused the mistakes.

"We report what the recipients submit to us," he said. "Some recipients clearly don't know what congressional district they live in, so they appear to be just throwing in any number."

Computer experts questioned that explanation. They noted all of the Web site's state links listed a District 00, indicating a technical glitch in how the data was received.

No House Republicans and only three GOP senators voted for the stimulus bill, which President Barack Obama signed into law Feb. 17.

Since then, Republican lawmakers relentlessly have criticized the bid to jump-start the economy, challenging the administration's claims of how many jobs it has saved or created.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing Thursday on problems in tracking the stimulus spending and measuring its impact.

Rosen covers Washington for McClatchy newspapers in South Carolina.